

Ferguson Academic Seed Fund (FASF)

Title: Increasing underrepresented minority student retention in Forrest Park Community College

Project Importance and Background: Greater levels of socioeconomic position, namely income and education, are associated with more favorable social, economic, and health outcomes. Education is considered the key vehicle to upward social mobility in the United States. The overall high school dropout rate is nearly 13% in the St. Louis region and the unemployment rate is estimated to be 9% overall but hovers around 16% for African Americans.¹ The median income for African Americans in the St. Louis region is roughly \$20,000 less than Whites (\$31,677 vs. \$51,465).² In terms of general health, African Americans have an elevated risk of physical morbidities and premature mortality compared to whites.³ It is critical to support students pursuing higher education in the region. This proposed study will investigate the efficacy of an intervention offered to community college students enrolled at Forest Park Community College. It will be a collaboration between Brown faculty and Better Family Life, which is located in North St. Louis City.

The St. Louis region is facing unique challenges, such as depopulation and deeply entrenched racial residential segregation. The tragic shooting death of the unarmed, 18-year old Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, has ignited a tinderbox, not only in the St. Louis metropolitan area, but throughout the United States. Subsequent protests throughout the community have been decades in the making, driven by substantial social and economic disparities.

This study has the potential to be highly impactful for this region. Results from an earlier small pilot study of this intervention revealed that it is critical to interact with students between the last day to drop classes and midterm examinations. This study will offer the intervention to a larger group of students and include the assessment of health outcomes. The results from this study will be impactful, not only for individual community college students, but also provide pilot data to pursue a federal grant in education and health: Education and Health: New Frontiers (R01) <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-16-080.html>

Approach

¹ U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. Data derived from Population Estimates, American Community Survey, Census of Population and Housing, State and County Housing Unit Estimates, County Business Patterns, Nonemployer Statistics, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits

² U.S. Census Bureau. 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) 3-Year Estimates. Retrieved from Social Explorer on October 7th 2013, from http://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2011_3yr/R10564005.

³ For the Sake of All: A Report on the Health and Well-Being of African Americans in St. Louis—and Why It Matters for Everyone. 2014. St. Louis, MO: Washington University in St. Louis and Saint Louis University.

The study will test whether a brief social belonging intervention will increase underrepresented minority student retention rates at Forrest Park Community College. The work builds on a previous effort showing positive results of increased retention and GPA. The plan is to design a random controlled trial where a sample of first year freshmen entering Forrest Park are assigned to either a controlled group of college preparation as usual or a 30 minute social belonging intervention consisting of a 13 minute video, *You are college material – You belong*, and 15-17 minute discussion. While there will be preparation and planning activities in early 2016, the intervention study will begin approximately the first weeks of Fall 2016. The study will enroll a total of 200 students, 100 in control and 100 in experimental group. We will randomly recruit from approximately 60 required Smart Start course sections where about 1,000 new, entering freshmen enroll. This represents about 16 students per course, needing about 6-7 courses for each sample – a total of about 12-14 Smart Start sections. The experimental group will receive the *You are college material – You belong* 30 minute intervention and the control group will receive a 30 minute educational session on social services within the college. At the end of each session, in both groups, we will ask students to complete a post-intervention survey measuring their understanding of the intervention. This RCT study will utilize some existing institutional data such as race, age, gender, hours enrolled, GPA, financial aid information, and reenrollment to next semester (Fall 2016 to Spring 2017). In early Spring 2017, we will locate 10 reenrolled students from each condition (n=20) and ask them to complete a short survey along with asking some open-ended questions regarding their reasons for successfully reenrolling.

Budget

I am seeking additional resources to fully support a research project at Forrest Park Community College intended to increase underrepresented minority student retention. I was awarded a Khinduka Fellowship that covered the cost of college student incentives to participate in the study and a part-time research assistance who would assist with student recruitment, consenting, follow-up, as well as help with literature reviews and other supports for a later NIH grant application. I am requesting and need an underrepresented (e.g. racial/ethnic minority in high education, first generation college student) **Graduate Research Assistant** (WashU) intervention delivery specialist, who I can train to deliver the brief retention intervention at Forrest Park Community College. It was suggested by senior researchers that the intervention be delivered by one person across all classes receiving the intervention and that it would be idea if that person was from an underrepresented minority community and also had community college/undergrad experience. Unfortunately, the fellowship was unable to fund this vital resource. Peer modeling is a powerful tool and has been proven to be effective across multiple fields including psychology, health behavior, and education. By hiring a person who is representative of the demographic we seek to serve, we not only anticipate a consistent delivery of the intervention, but also to help encourage positive outcomes.

The FASF Research Study Budget: Dr. David A. Patterson Silver Wolf will lead the study (In-Kind). The underrepresented minority **Graduate Research Assistant (\$6600)** will be trained and will deliver the intervention in both arms of the study at Forrest Park during the Fall 2016 semester as well as directly involved in other aspects of education and health and wellness research activities. S/he will also be included in NIH application development and future study team. The GRA and project will be in association with the new Collaboration on Race, Inequality, and Social Mobility in America (CRISMA) within Center for Social Development.

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Grant Application Project Member & Invited Scholar Bio Sketch Form

Please complete an electronic copy of this for each member of your project team and for each invited scholar. You will be required to upload completed bio sketch forms on the grant application page. You may collate forms into a single document for ease of submission.

Invited Scholar: _____ Team Member: _____ Both: _____

Team Member count: _____ of _____

TITLE:

FIRST NAME:

LAST NAME:

E-MAIL ADDRESS:

WEBPAGE:

AFFILIATE INSTITUTION (S):

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SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH (200 WORDS OR LESS):